United States Department of Agriculture
Research, Education, and Economics

ARS ❏ CSREES ❏ ERS ❏ NASS

Policies and Procedures

Title: Forms Management

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Branch, AFM/ARS

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1994

Distribution: All REE Offices in Headquarters, Areas, and Field
Locations

This P&P states policy and procedure for
the creation, approval, design, and
printing of the REE agencies' forms. It
also provides procedures for requesting
new or revised forms.

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1. Introduction

Need for Forms Management

Federal agencies use forms to organize, collect, and transmit information. By their specific characteristics, forms:

- often guide the flow of work through an office or an entire organization,

- further the efficiency and accuracy of many administrative and operating tasks or procedures with minimal backtracking or delay, and

- provide the means for collecting and transmitting information quickly and efficiently, compiling a compact record, and standardizing tasks and procedures.

Management of the Forms Program

The Chief, Information Systems Branch (ISB), Information Technology Division (ITD), oversees the REE agencies' forms management program. A forms manager is responsible for the day-to-day maintenance and operation of the program.

2. Statement of Policy

REE offices will create and use forms in a cost effective manner. Therefore, they will:

- Create forms only when absolutely necessary.

- Use forms as an efficient method of collecting information.

- Minimize the stocking and printing of low volume use forms by designing forms suited for local reproduction.

- Eliminate unnecessary and obsolete forms.

- Adopt electronic forms processing techniques and systems.

- Use available SF and AD forms when possible rather than creating agency-specific forms.

3. Operating the Forms Program

ISB operates the REE agencies forms program (including all ARS, ERS, and CSRESS forms; and only NASS' administrative forms. NASS operates a separate program for its program-related forms). The REE forms program functions include:

- Analysis

- Approval and Control

- Design and Composition

- Reproduction, Storage, and Stocking

- Periodic Forms Review

- Coordination and Training

Approval and Control

ISB assigns a number and an edition date to each new or revised form and maintains the following forms control records and files:

Historical Files. The official background files that consist of a record of each form from its development to its current status.

Functional Files. Used during forms analysis, these files contain a copy of related forms classified by subject. It is a working tool that brings together forms dealing with similar subjects and functions.

Forms Index. Used to publish a catalog of all REE forms and provides a complete listing of current, approved agency forms.

Design and Composition

ISB designs forms using a forms software package. Forms design and composition conform to the standards and guidelines set forth in the General Services Administration (GSA) Handbook, *Forms Analysis and Design.* These forms are electronically created and stored on local area networks (LAN's) and individual personal computers for user access. Users may retrieve, fill-in, store, transmit, and print forms from personal computers.

In addition to REE agencies' forms, ISB designs Agriculture Department (AD) forms and Standard and Optional forms (SF and OF), except those that GSA deems may not be electronically generated.

Upon completion of forms design, ISB:

- clears the final copy with the originating office for REE agencies' forms.

- requests approval of final copy from the Departmental Forms Manager for AD, SF, and OF forms.

- provides approved forms to LAN administrators or individual users.

Reproduction, Storage, and Stocking Methods

Reproduction, storage, and stocking of most forms is unnecessary. ISB provides electronically designed forms to LAN administrators and/or individual users in the REE agencies. The forms are then placed on a file server and/or on stand-alone personal computers, making them available to users with the filler software as needed. Storing forms on a LAN file server or on stand-alone personal computers eliminates the need to print and manually stock forms in valuable office space and ensures that the latest version is always available.

Electronic Forms. These forms consist of those that can be filled in electronically as well as those requiring completion by hand. However, there are a few forms that do not lend themselves to electronic fill in or storage (i.e., folders, cards, stickers, booklets, and envelopes). If a form is not available on your personal computer, contact ISB.

Printed Forms. ISB arranges for the printing, storage, and stocking of REE agencies' forms and AD forms sponsored by the REE agencies. These printed forms are stocked at the Consolidated Forms and Publications Distribution Center (CFPDC) located in Landover, Maryland, and/or at the ARS Beltsville Supply Warehouse. Additionally, the CFPDC stocks SF, AD, OF, and other Federal agencies' forms that are used USDA-wide.

Periodic Forms Review

ISB reviews each form periodically to determine if the form is still effective and economical. To conduct this review, ISB consults with managers, originators, processors, and users of a form to identify problems and recommend needed changes.

Coordination and Training

ISB maintains several continuing relationships:

Reports Management. The reports management staff is concerned with information collected and used by the agency. Much of this information is on forms. Neither the reports manager nor the forms manager can operate effectively without systematic and constant coordination.

Issuances (P&P) Management. A form should be prescribed by a P&P, unless it is self-explanatory. A P&P makes the introduction of a form official and ensures that correct clearance procedures are followed. P&P's provide the best medium for communicating guidance that cannot be placed completely on the face of the form, including:

- Clear instructions on who prepares the form, the number of copies prepared, and where and when to submit copies.

- A sample illustration of the form with sample entries, when this will help to ensure the accurate completion of the form.

- A description of the filing system used, if the records are kept in a specific way or for a specific length of time.

- Unusual information about the availability of the form; i.e., its source and date of supply.

ISB's staff reviews P&P's that reference forms. Likewise, before a new form is created, the ISB staff requests copies of related P&P's and/or other prescribing documents.

Information Technology (IT) Personnel. Prior to developing and programming systems, IT personnel should routinely involve the forms management staff to determine the feasibility of using an electronic form as the front-end vehicle for the new system.

In addition to coordinating and maintaining these relationships with other agency activities, ISB provides basic forms management training and training on the use of the filler software.

4. Procedures

Originators of REE Agencies Forms

This section explains the process for requesting new forms or changes to existing forms. Anyone can make such requests.

New Forms. Before creating a new form, consider the following questions:

- Is the form really necessary?

- Can an existing form meet this need?

- Will the proposed form fit the present or anticipated procedure?

- Will it improve operations?

- Will it be economical to use?

If the answers to the above questions justify the creation of a new form:

- Discuss the workload required by the form with the individuals and/or offices having an interest in the form.

- Develop the justification for the form.

- Develop the draft design and layout for the proposed form. Include necessary regulatory statements.

    1. **Forms used for claims or certification** must declare penalties for deliberate falsification, such as:

        Claim forms: "A knowingly false claim is a criminal offense. Title 18 U.S.C., section 1001."

        Forms not involving claims: "A willful false statement is a criminal offense. Title 18 U.S.C., section 1001."

    2. **Forms approved by Office of Management and Budget (OMB) under the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995** must contain a statement listing the valid OMB control number and the burden estimate.

    3. **The Privacy Act, 5 U.S.C. 552a,** requires the explanation to individuals directly solicited to give personal information:

        The authority (whether granted by statute or by Executive order) that authorized the solicitation of the information.

        The intended use of the information.

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Routine uses of the information.

Whether the disclosures of the information are mandatory or voluntary and the effects on individuals who do not provide all or any part of the requested information.

- Complete form REE-20, Request for Forms Design.

- Submit the draft copy, justification, and form REE-20 to the appropriate official within your organization for review and approval. If approved, submit the package to ISB.

Revised Forms.

- Develop the draft or note proposed changes on a copy of an existing form.

- Complete form REE-20, Request for Forms Design.

- Submit the draft copy or marked up version of the existing form and form REE-20 to the appropriate official within your organization for review and approval. If approved, submit the package to ISB.

- Notify ISB when the revision of a P&P requires a change in or elimination of an existing form.

Users of AD, SF, OF and Other Federal Forms

Users of AD, SF, OF, and other Federal forms who want these forms included in electronic format should submit to ISB both a blank copy and a completed version of the form. These forms are designed by ISB using the following guidelines:

- The electronic reproduction must be complete, containing all instructions and questions that appear on the current official form.

- The wording and punctuation of all items, instructions, and identifying information must match exactly.

- No data elements may be added or deleted.

- The sequence and format for each item on the form must be reproduced to the highest degree possible.

- Each item must print on the same page in approximately the same location. Forms printed face to back on the original may be printed on single sheets provided each page is

identified with the form number, page number, and edition date.   Multiple part sets may also be printed as single sheets.

- The final form must be printed using the same dimensions (length and width) as the current edition.

- All blocks must remain approximately the same size and lines must remain approximately the same length.

- The electronic form must contain the software name and vendor/producer at the bottom of the face page.

Exceptions to AD, SF, and OF Forms

Certain exceptions to forms are granted when it can be demonstrated that changing the content, format, or printing is cost effective.

- **Content** exceptions are changes to the data elements of the form such as additions, deletions, or revisions.

- **Format** exceptions are changes made by rearranging the data elements or changing the spacing of entries on a form without changing the data elements.

- **Printing** exceptions are changes in the printing specifications for a form (such as changes to paper, including size and establishment of sets and marginally punched constructions) that result in no changes in content or format.

To request exceptions, submit the following to ISB for approval:

AD Forms:

An original and one copy of form AD-687, Forms Action Request and Notice;

Sample copies of proposed changes; and

Justification or supporting documents.

SF and OF Forms:

An original and three copies of SF-152, Request for Clearance, Procurement, or Cancellation of Standard and Optional Forms;

Sample copies of proposed changes; and

A justification statement explaining the reasons for the request, including: Why the standard or optional form cannot be used in the prescribed, existing format or construction or is not economical as prescribed; the proposed alterations or changes; the expected cost benefits; and an estimate of the number of forms expected to be used in 1 year. Since the use of optional forms is not mandatory, an exception is not required if an agency elects not to use an optional form.

5.   Ordering Forms

Electronic Fill In Forms

Forms that can be filled in via personal computers are stored on LAN's or individual personal computers and are available for use as needed. If a supply of blank forms is required, users can:

- print, via office laser printer, the number of copies required; or

- print a supply of the form (using the electronic version as a camera copy) via the USDA Short Order Duplicating Stations, USDA Printing Plant, or if a field office, via a local printer.

All Other Forms

Order forms (including REE, ARS, AD, SF, and OF) incapable of being filled in electronically from the CFPDC, GSA, or the ARS Beltsville Supply Warehouse.

CFPDC-Stocked Forms:

Electronic Ordering. If possible, use the electronic ordering system. To do so, your office must have an appropriate computer terminal and telephone modem. This method reduces order turnaround time and minimizes data entry time and errors. Contact ISB for required customer identification numbers.

Mail Orders. Submit form CFPDC-1, Request for Forms and Publications, when ordering 15 line items or less. When ordering more than 15 line items, use form CFPDC-1A (Continuation Sheet). Be sure to include the order number from form CFPDC-1 in the space provided on the continuation sheet.

GSA-Stocked Forms:

Complete and submit form AD-633, Multiuse Standard Requisitioning/Issue System Document, to the GSA Federal Supply Service (FSS) office servicing your region. Detailed ordering procedures are found in the FEDSTRIP Operating Guide.

6.　Challenging Forms

REE personnel should critically evaluate frequently used forms and make recommendations for improvements or deletions to ISB, including reasons for any changes. Employees should consider these questions:

- What other forms provide all or part of the information requested?

- Why is the form cumbersome?

- Why is the requested information either not available, available only at an unreasonable cost, or of questionable value?

- Why has the form lost validity or currency?

7.　Summary of Responsibilities

Chief, Information Systems Branch, ITD.

- Manages the REE Agencies Forms Management Program, including the

    - Control and coordination of forms development activities.

    - Review of REE agencies' form requirements and assignment of form numbers and edition dates.

    - Approval of forms for usage and printing.

    - Cancellation of forms no longer needed.

- Assures conformity with Department policies and standards, including adequate systems for reviewing, clearing, and controlling forms.

- Analyzes and designs all REE agencies' forms (except nonadministrative NASS forms) to conform with standards prescribed in the GSA Forms Design Handbook.

- Designs electronic versions of ARS, AD, SF, OF, and other Federal agencies' forms upon request.

- Assists the REE agencies in establishing and implementing agency forms management programs.

- Maintains a central historical file of internal agency forms.

- Monitors forms usage and stocking quantities.

- Coordinates forms management with other areas of information management.

- Analyzes, reviews, and approves requests for exceptions to SF, OF, and AD forms, before forwarding to the Departmental Forms Management Officer (DFMO).

- Provides technical assistance to all serviced agencies.

- Represents the REE agencies in matters relating to forms management with the Department.

- Notifies the DFMO of needed changes on AD forms and submits copies to the DFMO for review.

Headquarters, Areas, and Location Offices

- Coordinate forms management within the organization following procedures in this P&P.

- Provide liaison with ISB.

- Create and approve only necessary forms in the administration of functional areas.

- Develop requirements and draft the layout of new forms.

- Determine if the information being collected is available from other sources or other forms.

- Coordinate a new requirement with ISB and the Issuances Manager.

- Ensure each new form developed or revised is supported by a P&P prescribing its use, when applicable. Provide ISB with a copy of supporting P&P's.

- Coordinate the conversion of REE agencies' use of printed forms to an electronic version with ISB.

Survey Management Division, NASS

- Provides all forms management support to NASS for program forms and questionnaires.

ERS Printing Officer

- Processes forms printing orders submitted by ISB for ARS and REE forms.

Originators of Forms

- Ensure that an issuance prescribes and supports the use of each form.

- Develop draft, design, and layout for the forms that they originate.

- Establish initial quantities and determine inventory and reorder levels for such forms.

- Develop justification statements to obtain approval for exceptions to SF, OF, and AD forms.

All Forms Users

- Notify ISB when electronic forms require adjustments.

- Order forms only when necessary.

- Evaluate frequently used forms and make recommendations for improvements or deletions.

/s/

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